

Preventive Archaeology, Scientific Research and Public Outreach: Some Non-politically Correct Thoughts

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Abstract:

Since the Valletta Convention, the basis of almost all of the laws in European countries regarding preventive archaeology is the Polluter-pays principle. One major consequence has been an extraordinary increase of funds, in parallel with an identical increase in the number of archaeological operations. But there are also negative consequences: the struggle between archaeological companies, the role of the developers (who pay the excavation and so choose the operators), the public outreach as a goal instead of research. These aspects are examined here, in a non-politically correct way.

Keywords: Preventive archaeology, Research, Public outreach, Developer

Résumé

Depuis l'adoption de la convention de Malte-La Valette le principe pollueur-payeur est adopté dans la plupart des pays européens pour le financement de l'archéologie préventive. Une des principales conséquences fut un accroissement considérable des fonds attribués à l'archéologie préventive ainsi qu'une forte augmentation des données scientifiques acquises. Mais il y a également des retombées négatives : la compétition entre les opérateurs en archéologie, le rôle des aménageurs (qui financent les opérations archéologiques et donc qui choisissent les opérateurs), et la communication vers le grand public comme but à la place de la recherche scientifique. Ces aspects sont examinés ici, dans une optique non-politiquement correcte.

The Legal framework of French preventive archaeology: a summary

Since 2001, French preventive archaeology is organized according to the European Convention of Valletta (see Collart 2012) for a complete history of the process; Cat-eddu, et al. 2012; Depaepe & Salas-Rossenbach 2013 concerning the role of INRAP).

The Law relating to preventive archaeology stresses the importance and specificity of this discipline, the goal of which is *“to ensure [...] the detection, the conservation or the safeguard through their scientific study of those elements of the archaeological heritage affected or likely to be affected by public or private works in the framework of urban and rural development”*. All of these measures have been synthesized in the French Heritage Code.

Three partners are involved in the process: the state, the developer and the archaeologists. The developer puts up the money for archaeology (it's the “polluter-pays” principle); the state orders the archaeological evaluations and excavations and has control over them; the operator does the job.

There are two major phases (Fig. 1). The first phase involves an evaluation of the archaeological potential (called *“diagnostic”* -diagnosis- in French archaeological vocabulary). This phase can only be carried out by public services (INRAP or local authority services) and is paid for by a tax on each construction project. Local authority services must be licensed by the state after scientific appraisal by the National Council for Archaeological Research. The aims of the evaluation are to “...detect, characterize, localize and date potential archaeological remains in the area scheduled for development.”

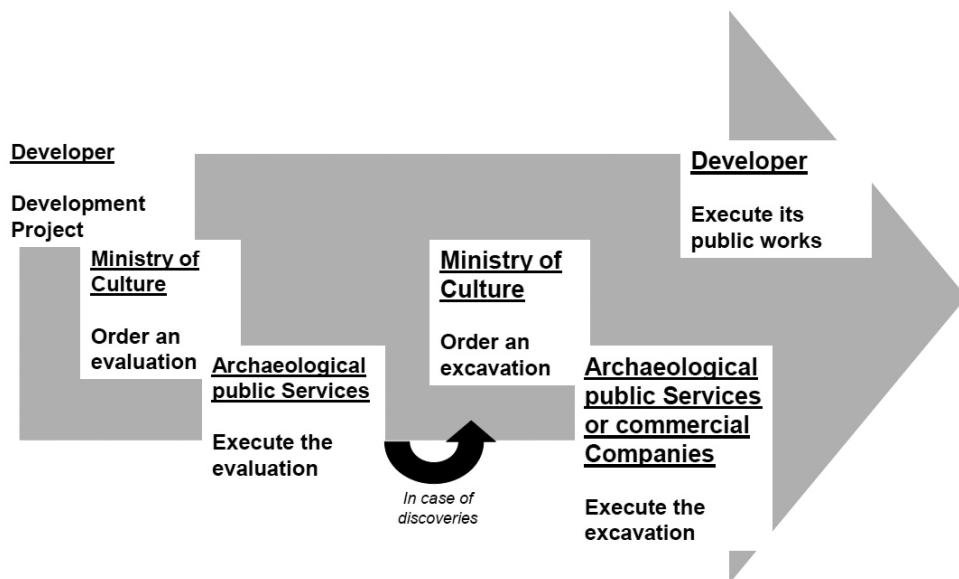


Fig. 1. Administrative Phases of French Preventive Archaeology.

The second one is, if a site is discovered, the excavation. It's directly paid for by the developer (according to the Polluter-pays principle) and can be carried out by public archaeology services or commercial companies under license (license on the basis of a scientific appraisal from the National Council for Archaeological Research).

The operations are assessed by six committees, the CIRA (Commission for archaeological research). These committees express opinions on the authorization requests of planned excavations and on the prescriptions within the framework of preventive archaeology. CIRA are necessarily seized, when an extension (extra time) of the duration of the operation is needed when deciding if specific measures for preservation are necessary during the course of operation and when decisions relative to above ground remains are made. In this context, at the end of the authorized or prescribed operation, they assess the scientific content of all site reports. (See website in the bibliography).

The law was recently changed in July 2016. This major change concerns the archaeological finds that become the property of the state. There are some other modifications regarding the local authorities' archaeology services.

However, some politicians think that public services are too expensive (and not only in the domain of archaeology!). In their opinion (this mainly concerns the right-wing politicians but not exclusively) the public sector should only carry out evaluations and excavations should be restricted to commercial companies. For most neo-liberals, all archaeology should be carried out by private companies. It's not a legal problem regarding competition and the free-market because the French Constitutional Council has admitted the possibility of a state monopoly in 2001 (see website in the bibliography). It's just ideology, with a lot of consequences.

Preventive Archaeology, Cultural Heritage, and Science

In Europe, preventive archaeology is most certainly now the main source of archaeological data, about 90% in France, and each European country has a more or less strong legislation for archaeology and cultural heritage. But there are two components in archaeology: scientific research and cultural heritage.

In my opinion, these two components are very different. Indeed the purpose of scientific research is to study the story of mankind through its material productions. But the purpose of cultural heritage is to protect the archaeological record (its artifacts, monuments, and sites) and to transmit it to future generations. It's not the same thing.

Preventive archaeology is a link between these two components: its purpose is to rescue our cultural heritage by its study (scientific research), as archaeological sites are destroyed by development. So we must, as archaeologists working in preventive

archaeology, fulfill these two obligations: conservation and research. I think that the first one is relatively well managed. Our stores are full of artifacts, inventories, pictures, drawings, etc. But what about the research? The reality is that in most countries the research has not followed in the footsteps of the development of preventive archaeology. In many European countries, excavation reports are written to varying degrees of accomplishment, but so few are published. For example in Poland in 2009, 98% of the papers were published by public services of archaeology, and only 2% by private companies (Fig. 2). During the same year 2009, 5319 archaeological operation permits were issued in Poland (Filipowicz & Mickiewicz 2011).

The problem is that in most European countries, the laws regarding preventive archaeology do not require the scientific publication of the archaeological fieldwork. In most cases, there is neither time nor money for publishing. The gray literature is one of the main challenges of the archaeology of tomorrow. And another danger is the risk of the coexistence of two kinds of archaeology, without any bridges between them: a first one producing theories and models; a second one excavating but not publishing its findings.

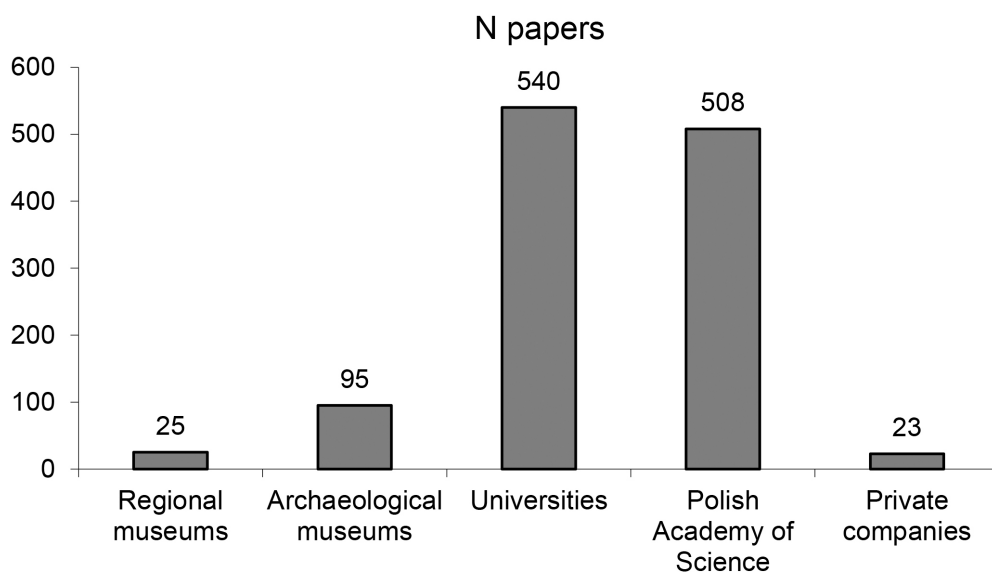


Fig. 2. Papers published in Poland in 2009 (after Filipowicz & Mickiewicz 2011).

Malta principles and preventive archaeology

The origins of preventive archaeology are to be found in the post-war reconstruction of Europe, and during the phase of economic growth from the sixties to the eighties.

Many scandals (destructions of archaeological sites and ancient monuments) showed the need for a better protection of our buried heritage. One answer was the negotiation of the Valletta (or Malta) Convention in 1992, which is at the present time signed by 44 countries (Stäuble 2013). This convention describes a lot of principles including:

- The scientific significance of preventive archaeology
- The need of increasing the material resources for preventive archaeology

The Malta Convention completely changed the face of European archaeology by a huge increase of funds, archaeological operations, and archaeologists. For example, the number of archaeologists was less than 2000 in 1980 in the UK but went up to 6865 by August 2007 (Aitchinson 2010). The number of archaeological operations in Ireland was less than 400 in 1996 and more than 2000 in 2003 (Eogan 2010). It's the same situation in the Netherlands: less than 1000 operations in 2002, almost 4900 in 2008, just before the crisis (source: Rijksdienst Voor het Cultureel Erfgoed; website in the bibliography). In France, the number of the archaeological prescriptions (ordered by the state) grew to 4270 in 2002; only 1752 were counted in 2000, before the law regarding preventive archaeology (Collart 2012).

But this was the situation before the crisis!

The economic crisis of 2008 and its effects on preventive archaeology

European preventive archaeology has been strongly affected by the crisis of 2008. The decrease in the number of developments has led to a collapse in preventive archaeology.

So the results have been:

- Collapse of operations due to a strong decrease of public works (by example -24% in France from 2006 to 2009 (Collart 2012))
- Ferocious competition between commercial archaeology companies
- More precarious jobs, competition between archaeologists not for scientific reasons but for salaries issues
- Collapse of jobs: e.g. in Ireland, "follow-up surveys by the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland in 2008 and 2009 suggest that the reduction in excavation activity has led to a consequential reduction in employment levels in the private sector where employment fell by 80%" (after Eogan 2010, 20)
- Loss of knowledge because of the bankruptcy of private companies or poorly done excavations or unpublished results. E.g., in France the company "Archéoloire" bankrupted in 2014 left one excavation unfinished and at least 11 excavation reports unwritten.
- Salaries in archaeology are below average compared to other professions (Bitelli, et al., 2013) Fig. 3)



Fig. 3. Differences in salary between archaeologists and the average of salaries, in France and Italy (French sources INSEE and INRAP; Italian sources after Bitelli, et al., 2013).

So the economic crisis has demonstrated the weakness of the majority of the preventive archaeology systems. In fact, the countries or autonomous regions where the system is totally (e.g. Wallonia, (Depaepe, et al. 2015); Saxony) or partially public (France) have resisted better to the crisis.

The polluter-pays principle and its consequences

In the majority of European countries, funds for preventive archaeology originate from the developers themselves: it's the Developer-pays principle.

It's not the main topic of this paper, but we can ask ourselves "Who really pays?" Indeed, as explained by J. Vanmoerkerke in France (paper presented at the EAA 2016 Vilnius session TH2-10), on small projects the cost of excavation is often supported by the landowner, not by the developer. Regarding motorways or railways, the cost of archaeology is included in the price of the tickets or tolls. And in the case of excavations supported by public authorities, it's the general public who pays, through their taxes.

As we have seen previously one of the major consequences of the Polluter-pays principle has been the important increase of funding in archaeology.

But the Polluter-pays principle could also be considered a great danger for preventive archaeology. In the majority of European countries, preventive archaeology

came from the cultural heritage world, not from the world of the scientific research. Indeed the aim of the archaeologists at the beginning of preventive archaeology was to make the public (and the politicians) aware of the problem of the destruction of archaeological sites. Their hidden agenda was to obtain the funds to be able to study the sites. One of the ways commonly used in France (and in other countries) was to alert the general public to these destructions using the media with the aim of putting pressure on the politicians. And as politicians are afraid of scandal, it has been the best way to create a new kind of archaeology introducing the Polluter-pays principle which has put a lot of money into the archaeological system. So the Polluter-pays principle has been an extraordinary asset in the development of preventive archaeology.

But one consequence of the polluter-pays principle is that the developer pays, so he orders the excavation. And the developer doesn't buy archaeology or knowledge of the past, he buys a piece of land to build a factory, or a road, or anything else... and preventive archaeology is the only economic activity where the client has no interest in buying the product. Archaeologists desperately try to convince developers and politicians of the importance of archaeology, by offering derivatives such as public outreach. Developers love public outreach because it's a very efficient way to interest the general public in something other than the development project itself (because people want to drive cars but they don't like to have a motorway built by their home). Politicians also love public outreach: it's faster than science (science is so slow!), it's perfect during electoral campaigning and more popular. It's happened sometimes that the same politician, who wanted to stop an archaeological project, opens the exhibition that stems from the same project.

So all agree that the pre-eminence given to public outreach was important during the birth of preventive archaeology, but can now be considered a sort of cancer. Indeed, the risk, underlined by some archaeologists, is to excavate primarily for public outreach (or just "*to fulfill legal and regulatory obligations*") (Hutchings & La Salle 2013; 2015), and only subsequently for the scientific community, whereas an archaeological site must first and foremost be excavated for scientific reasons. To be clear, it's not a criticism of the archaeologists, who are often passionate people, but their values are not always those of their employers.

The time has come to think about our real reasons for excavating.

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